

My name is Matthew Sweeney. I am a resident of Danbury as well as a parent and educator. I oppose the Governor's proposed FY 24-25 budget for elementary and secondary education for two reasons. First, the budget doesn't do enough to address the current needs of the existing public schools in Danbury. Secondly, it provides money for a charter school – something we don't need and certainly don't want in our city.

The state needs to fully fund the ECS and help districts like Danbury close the gap between existing funding and what we need to appropriately educate our students. The district is over-crowded and we have many, many students with extensive needs. As a professional school counselor, though not in Danbury, I can attest to the fact that our counselors' caseloads are far too high to be effective in helping students navigate the complexities of high school scheduling, mental health needs, and post-secondary college and career counseling. This has dire consequences for the students as they move through the school system and are unable to access vital services due to a lack of staffing.

On a related note - a charter school in Danbury will do nothing but exacerbate the current situation. Let's focus on providing our existing schools with the support and finances they require to serve all of our students and let's not get distracted by shiny object syndrome. Fund our schools appropriately and there will not be a perceived "need" for privately-managed charter schools, just like there is no need in Ridgefield, Greenwich, Westport, Newtown, Darien, etc.

Thank you for your time.

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